Weight Bearing Exercises to Prevent Osteoporosis Fractures

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Weight Bearing Exercises for Osteoporosis

As we grow older, it is natural for us to lose some of the density in our bones. Often confused with osteoarthritis, osteoporosis is a unique and prevalent bone disease that causes bone loss; treatment aims to slow or prevent this concerning bone loss. When bone loss occurs, there is an increased risk of a fragility fracture, even from a minor fall or another injury. Bone fractures due to osteoporosis may have serious, long-lasting consequences such as ongoing pain, disability, and sadly, sometimes death. In this article, we are going to talk about weight bearing exercises for osteoporosis, as they help improve posture. In turn, this helps prevent pain.

How Do I Know if I Have Osteoporosis?

It’s difficult to know if you have osteoporosis because it can occur without any noticeable symptoms. Many men and women are not diagnosed with osteoporosis until they suffer a painful fracture resulting from a minor stumble or fall. Sometimes, there is pain associated with osteoporosis, and this pain can come from different sources. Pain is the most notable symptom of osteoporosis.

Many individuals with osteoporosis, like me, do not experience any pain at all. If you suffer a fracture, there can be significant acute pain, which generally resolves itself as the fracture heals over weeks. For some, osteoporosis may cause spinal compression fractures, resulting in chronic pain in the back and torso. In extreme cases, this spinal compression can lead to the spine curving forward, resulting in the ribs sitting on the pelvic bone. Pain from this can be challenging to manage effectively, and severe damage may require surgery. Our muscles may constantly spasm and tense, which can painfully pinch nerves. Some individuals with osteoporosis experience tiny, painful microscopic fractures; areas of the body that are more often associated with fractures are the hips, spine, and wrists.

The Pros and Cons of Exercise and Osteoporosis

Exercise is incredibly crucial for our overall health and wellbeing. Regular exercise is beneficial in the fight against cardiovascular disease, helps us maintain an ideal body composition, reduces symptoms associated with depression, and improves and maintains muscular strength and endurance. Regular weight bearing exercise and strength training also allows us to maintain and improve our posture.

When we exercise, mainly when we perform weight bearing exercises, we protect our spinal column, slow down our bone loss rate, and improve our muscular strength. All of which also helps us to improve our balance, and better balance means fewer falls! While weight bearing exercise cannot build bone mass in adulthood (optimal bone mass is achieved in childhood), it will help to improve our coordination, strength, and balance, which will reduce the risk of a fracture caused by falling.

Most health and medical experts agree that regular exercise is fine for those with osteoporosis. Many healthcare experts recommend avoiding bending and twisting at the spine to prevent compression fractures in your spine.

Still, it is always a great idea to talk about your plans to exercise with your health care team so that they can review your overall health and make the right exercise recommendations, just for you.

Talk to Your Doctor About an Exercise Routine

Before starting any new exercise or physical activity, check in with your doctor. Your doctor may recommend a bone density measurement and a fitness assessment. While exercise is typically recommended for all individuals, it must be the right exercise. Be cautious about taking on too much, too soon. Also, be aware of more high-risk exercises, sports, and physical activities that may not be your best choice. I love downhill mountain biking, but I choose to avoid high-risk jumps and drops as these are more likely to lead to a bone fracture.

If you are obese, have other medical conditions, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, or have limited mobility due to another disease, it is imperative that you talk to your doctor before beginning exercise. A conversation with your doctor will guide you toward the best activity choices for you and your health.

Workout Tips and Tricks

- Set short-term goals, such as building the habit of being active for at least 10 minutes every day. Weight-bearing exercise can be as simple as a regular walk.
- Work with a health care professional that specializes in osteoporosis to determine which exercises are best for you, and that you will find enjoyment doing.
- Set a long-term goal of engaging in strength training twice a week, balance exercises every day, focusing on your posture every day, and some form of aerobic activity for at least 10 minutes every day.
- Any physical activity is easier to stick with if it is something that you enjoy doing! It may take some trial and error, but you are sure to find something that you love.
- Check your community resources. Many communities have osteoporosis groups that exercise together, and some fitness centers offer classes designed for those with osteoporosis.

What Are Weight Bearing Exercises?

Weight bearing exercises simply mean that you are performing an activity on your feet, either on one or both, and that you are carrying your own body weight.

An exercise that involves the addition of external weights, such as dumbbells, resistance bands, or cabled weights, means that you are increasing the weight load. Such activity should be done with the assistance of a physiotherapist, kinesiologist, or registered personal trainer in order to ensure proper technique, safe movements, and other safety considerations such as heart rate.

The Best Weight Bearing Exercises for Osteoporosis

When considering your options for exercise to improve your osteoporosis and your overall health, there are two main types of activities that you will want to engage in regularly.

First, weight bearing exercises, and secondly, muscle strengthening exercises. The best weight-bearing exercises for osteoporosis will depend on many factors: your current fitness level, health conditions, and mobility will guide you in your choices of weight-bearing exercises.

Another important consideration when choosing the right weight-bearing exercise for you is how much impact is involved. Your ability to tolerate any impact, from activities such as dancing, jogging, or jumping rope, will depend on how severe your osteoporosis is and any other health conditions you may have. Consult your health care team to review how much impact you can tolerate safely.

Additionally, be careful when choosing activities that move your spine; a deep forward bend may increase your spinal fracture risk. For this reason, it is critical to consult with your health care team about the exercises and

activities that are most appropriate for your condition.

There are many fantastic low impact weight-bearing exercises available for you to enjoy, which will help you reduce the consequences of your osteoporosis. One of my favorites is the elliptical machine, which gives me a reliable, low impact, weight-bearing cardiovascular exercise. I also enjoy a brisk walk outdoors or on an indoor treadmill when the weather is poor. There are many low impact aerobics classes available, either in your community or via online videos. Yoga and Pilates are also some of my favorite weight bearing exercises, as they improve my muscular endurance, strength, balance, and range of motion.

The Takeaway

It’s not too late to start a regular, thoughtfully designed exercise program that will improve your health. Improving your balance and strengthening all of your muscles can go a long way in preventing a fall. Fractures due to osteoporosis can be life-limiting, and the pain can be challenging to endure, so begin your regular activity soon!